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ABSTRACT

Maryland's decade of experience in providing programs for gifted and talented students indicates that response to the needs of such students has been strongest when federal, state, and local policy and financial commitments were complementary. The notion that federal financial support is not necessary and may even be counterproductive is demonstrably untrue. The development of Maryland's school-based programs, serving 45,000 students in 1982-83, was promoted by financial support from federal and state sources, as was the creation of demonstration schools at the senior, middle, and elementary school levels. The creation of staff development centers and projects within local school systems was made possible by support from federal, state, and local sources. Also reflecting the power of integrated federal, state, and local policy are Maryland's innovative summer centers, which provide intensive residential programs of study in the sciences, humanities, visual and performing arts, economics, social sciences, psychology, creative writing, environmental studies, mathematics, government, and foreign languages. Initially, the centers were financed with modest state support and federal dollars, but, as state support has increased, federal funds have been shifted to nurture the local staff development centers. (RH)

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SUMMARY: MARYLAND'S COMPREHENSIVE APPROACH TO GIFTED AND TALENTED EDUCATION

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Since the early 1970s Maryland has systematically pursued a comprehensive approach to meet the needs of gifted and talented students. Included are a) school-based programs for students, b) staff development activities for teachers and administrators and c) intensive summer centers that serve students but also provide laboratories for program development and staff training.

As a result in school year 1982-83, 45,000 students, or 7 percent of the school enrollment, were served in programs specifically designed for the gifted and talented.

It is clear from the history of our efforts in Maryland that the response to the needs of the gifted has been strongest when federal, state and local policy and financial commitments were complementary. Our ability to mount a comprehensive approach with phased stages of development within each of the program components -- students services, staff training and laboratory summer centers -- has been possible because federal, state and local dollars made possible a repertoire of strategies. The notion that federal financial support is not necessary in this area or that, as some assert, it may even be counterproductive, is demonstrably untrue. In fact state and local support rises in direct relation to the federal policy and dollar commitment.

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School-Based Programs

In 1973 the Maryland State Board of Education created a statewide leadership team to press into place policies and programs in the twenty-four local school systems. A decade later each of the systems has a strong board policy and a comprehensive plan for services to its students and teachers. Programs are in operation in 1,005 of the 1,169 schools of the state. (Some systems use regional centers rather than individual school models or the total would be nearer to 100 percent.) As mentioned above, 45,000 students were served in school year 82-83.

This growth was promoted by the State Department of Education through technical assistance teams, financial support from federal and state sources and a variety of policy statements including the "Guidelines for Program Development" of the mid-1970s.

In addition, the Department used a mix of federal and state dollars to create demonstration schools at the senior, middle and elementary school level within three different local school systems. Teams of administrators and teachers from schools across the state were brought to the centers throughout the school year for a week of intensive observation and training. Each team left with a plan of action for its own school.

As we turned into the 80s, the need for assistance in general planning lessened as local policies, skills and programs matured and expanded. We shifted our focus in two ways. First we began to concentrate more carefully on questions of quality and produced the "Criteria for Excellence" in gifted programming. Second we intensified our interest in teacher training and staff development.

Staff Development

We have addressed staff development from the very beginning of our efforts, initially creating a cadre of administrators and teachers through state level training and the use of our summer institutes for school principals. The latest evolution of our work are the local school systems' staff development centers and projects, begun in 1980. The centers and projects are designed by school systems in response to our criteria. They are to serve as laboratory centers for the exploration of programming and training of particular interest to the district. Ten centers are being funded each year. In school year 82-83 800 teachers were directly involved in the centers. They in turn provide training to their colleagues so we estimate the multiplier effect reaches several thousand teachers.

These centers not only enhance the skills of teachers and administrators, but also, of course, yielding interesting new curricular and instructional approaches that will be examined for replication throughout the state. Financial support comes from a mix of federal, state and local dollars.

Summer Centers

Perhaps the best known of the Maryland approaches -- and arguably the stimulus for much of our other work -- is the network of summer centers conducted by the

Department annually since the early 70s. In the summer of 1983 we ran 99 programs at 13 centers, and enrolled 2,600 students drawn from grades 5-12 (Worth noting is a minority enrollment of 19 percent.)

These centers are unique in the country. Typically students spend two weeks or more in a residential program. They are selected competitively using a comprehensive application process that includes auditions or performance ratings for the arts programs.

The programs address a wide range of gifts and talents. For instance, students may study intensively in any of the performing or visual arts at the Center for the Arts, may conduct experiments in marine biology at the center on the Chesapeake Bay, can become immersed in a foreign language and culture (including Japanese) at the Advanced Studies Center, or learn effective group dynamics at the Leadership Center.

Last summer programs were offered in science, humanities, visual and performing arts, economics, social sciences, psychology, creative writing, environmental students, mathematics, government and foreign languages. As could be expected the computer science programs are immensely popular as, increasingly, are those that have an international dimension.

Students (and parents) over the past decade have repeatedly evaluated the center programs as their single most important educational experience, not only illuminating a field or discipline, but deepening a sense of personal worth and clarifying a career or direction in life.

The centers also have served as the stimulus and model for program development in the local schools systems, since they provide laboratories for curriculum and instructional strategies and contexts for teacher training. The success of the summer centers prompted us to design the staff development centers mentioned above.

To make the point one final time, these centers reflect the power of integrated federal, state and local policy. In their early days the centers were financed with modest state support and federal dollars from ESEA. In 1979 the Governor and legislature for the first time made them a line item in the state budget. Last year the state support rose to $600,000. Federal dollars, now no longer needed for this purpose, have been shifted to nurture the local staff development centers.

Support for line item commitments in local budgets for all gifted and talented programming has grown throughout the decade to a $6 million level in school year 1982-83.

The issue before us is to sustain these policy and financial commitments and to address continually and imaginatively the challenge posed by the truly gifted and talented.